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ABSTRACT

A functional theory of semantics that accounts for idioms, rigid expressions, and language variability and indeterminacy is explored. The theory is based on the distinction between language as a natural, social phenomenon and linguistic systems as the constructions of linguists, and avoids the usual tendency of theory to assume that language is a logical system. It allows for explanation of variability as the creation of linguistic forms within given contexts, without attempting to pin it down to a specific rule, and distinguishes between structural and functional indeterminacy. Idioms, metaphors, the use of prepositions with unforseeable illocutions, fantasy, science fiction, and interpretable and uninterpretable nonsense are treated as the result of a form of indeterminacy, or creativity--an unpredictable condition within conventional linguistic theory. (MSE)

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FUNCTIONAL TEXT SEMANTICS, IDIOMS, AND VARIABILITY

by

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A recurring subject in linguistics is the treatment of idiomatic expressions. In this paper I want to outline a functional theory of semantics, and account for idioms and rigid collocations within this general theory. Another concern arising in the paper will be that of linguistic variability and indeterminacy.

It is a very preliminary sketch, and purports to be suggestive rather than a full-fledged, detailed scheme. The approach is eclectic, and though the main interest is in the area of semantics, what emerges is in effect an alternate framework for the analysis of language.[1]

[1] I would like to thank the staff at the Dept of Linguistic Science at the University of Reading; and the members of Prof. N.E. Enkvist's Text Linguistics Research Group at Åbo Akademi for invaluable discussions on topics related to semantic and other matters, and for providing me with a most healthy linguistic atmosphere.

I would here also like to express my gratitude to Prof. H.W. Donner for making my stay at Reading (1975-76) financially possible.

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This article is a summary of the ideas laid down in my pro-gradu thesis (Åbo Akademi 1976), and a revised version of a paper given at the First Conference of the Linguistic Association of Finland (Lammi, September, 1977). Earlier versions of this particular paper have been commented on by Nils Erik Enkvist, Fred Karlsson, Geoffrey Phillips, and Erik Andersson. I am most grateful for their criticism and suggestions. They do, of course, not necessarily share any of the views expressed in the article.

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10 Semantics

1. Language and linguistics

It is often stressed that language as we see or hear it around us every day far from makes up a rigid system. However, this non-rigidity, or variability, is manifested not only in the variety in what has been called a speaker's p e r f o r m a n c e, but can -- as we shall see later -- be found also in what is usually regarded as his c o m p e t e n c e of a language. One way of trying to account for variablity in language in a linguistic theory is to impose other types of rules over and above strict competence rules. And many scholars no doubt hope that one day we will be able to work out a system that makes all aspects of language predictable. The approach in the present article will be of a slightly different kind, however.

Language is a social phenomenon, and linguistics ultimately therefore a social science. As a social phenomenon language would be described in terms of rules which differ from the laws, or regularities, that characterize most (though not all) natural sciences. Linguistic rules aim at reflecting the norms on which a language system, or language systems are built, and which make possible the use of language for everyday communication.

If we accept such a difference in kind between the r u l e s constituting the typical social sciences on the one hand, and the l a w s of typical natural sciences on the other, then the next step is to decide what kind of theory is needed to describe either of them. The ideal theory of any branch of science is one that will account as accurately as possible for all the facts in the respective subject matter. And this, of course, is also what most theories -- at some stage -- claim to achieve.

During the last decade or so, transformational-generative grammar has been extensively criticized by scholars who would like an appropriate linguistic theory to cover not merely the means by which we communicate as human beings, but also our use of language in concrete communicative situations. That is, it is argued that a linguistic theory should not merely be structural (i.e., a theory that purpots to impose a structure on, or reproduce the structure of, language -- for instance as a network of relations), but that it should also (or, rather) be a functional theory (pertaining to reproduce the function of language). With a few exceptions, however, such a plea for a functional theory has usually not advanced beyond

the programmatic stage.

In linguistics a distinction needs to be maintained between the subject matter, language, as a natural, social phenomenon, and linguistic systems as theories about language, constructed by linguists. At the level of theory construction this means that we have to keep apart atheoretical statements and theoretical rules (cf. Itkonen 1974).

As a human construct a linguistic system may be computable, and thus well-defined (in the sense of Hockett 1968). Linguistic systems become well-defined by stipulating rigorous rules and having all the words in a language make up a closed lexicon. -- Language as the subject matter of the social science of linguistics, however, would be ill-defined since it does not necessarily make use of these rules. The linguistic rules can be broken.

The Humboldtian and Chomskyan infinite-use-of-finite-means principle is applicable only in the area of linguistic theory, or rather, to the sub-area of competence within it. (This of course raises the question as to whether performance is to be taken as a part of linguistic theory, or whether it is merely to comprise the factors that have been idealized away when constructing the theory.) The linguistic, theoretical rules constitute the finite means, the algorithm, which enables us to compute the infinite use. In this sense linguistic theories are well-defined. (It is another matter that this linguistic system produces material that constitute an infinite set. According to Hockett (1968:48) "the test for infinitude or finiteness of a set c a n n o t b e a p p l i e d in the absence of well-definition".)

2. Form and function

Let us begin by accepting the general view that, theoretically speaking, language is made up of a f o r m and a f u n c t i o n, and from the point of view of the theory which follows keep these aspects of language apart. Indeed, these two aspects of language are not necessarily characteristic of language per se, but as concepts they are helpful when describing language. Needless to say, the border between what is definitely a matter of form as opposed to function will to a certain extent be ill-defined or shady.

It is then possible to superimpose a form-function dichotomy on the traditional distinction between expression (signifiant) and content (signifié):

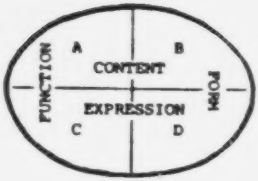

Figure 1.

In Figure 1, B stands for 'formal content': phenomena in the universe which are given labels with linguistic signs, and which these signs in themselves abstract from the outside world. -- D is the linguistic sign itself, e.g. a syntactically defined morpheme or clause. And the relationship between B and D is that of reference (in a broad sense).

A is the 'functional content', which includes the interrelationships, such as causality connections, between extralinguistic phenomena. C is the 'functional expression', which consists of communicatively relevant language-functional elements in language.

In this framework then, a linguistic description of f o r m would be a picture of the means we have to use when and if we want to communicate verbally. The aspect of f u n c t i o n is an abstraction of the use to which we put utterances in contexts-of-situation.

I will not say much about the f o r m , or the s t r u c t u r e , of language, since its characteristics have been worked out in some detail by different linguistic 'schools' like transformational-generative grammar, systemics, tagmemics, and stratificational grammar, to mention just the best known. In their details these theories seem to vary quite extensively, but since the subject matter, language, is their common object of investigation, they must all claim to be able to account for it. To the extent that they satisfy this requirement the basic differences between them must be largely terminological. The interpretive school of transformational-generative grammar -- in the spirit of linguistic structuralism -- deliberately treats language as a pattern of f o r m without letting the situational setting of an utterance or a sentence influence the object of study. Systemics, tagmemics, and the stratificational approach, on the other hand, see language as a hierarchy (of levels, or strata), which go from phonetics through phonemics, syntax, and semantics, and end up in some way or other touching the outside world. In this way then, these theories try to account

for language as part of, and functioning in, a communicative situation. -- Within the transformational-generative approach the recent emphasis on presuppositions and performatives can in a sense be seen as a trick to bring function into form.

Briefly, and without in this presentation touching too much on details as to whether e.g. V, or T, or S (or what have you) is to be regarded as the 'initial symbol' of the syntactic rules, this is how I see the aspect of form in language:

The formal-expression part of linguistics, D in Fig. 1., is an abstraction of the potentialities of language and consists of two closely interrelated 'parts': phonology, and morpho-syntax.

The morpho-syntactic part of linguistics forms a hierarchy of different sized units of language with morphemes as the smallest units, and 'rising' in the hierarchy we would find morpheme-complexes, clauses, and clause-complexes.[2] The relation between morphemes/morpheme-complexes and clause is that of the latter 'consisting-of' the former. The morpheme-complexes and clauses (which can be rank-shifted into morpheme-complexes) are concatenated outputs of a finite set of (recursive) rules, and the output is infinite in the Chomskyan sense.

In an interdependently parallel manner to this morpho-syntactic hierarchy runs the phonological hierarchy, with distinctive features as its minimal units. Moving 'upwards' from distinctive features there would be phonetic signs (phonemes), phonetic clusters (syllables), and syllable-complexes. Outside the distinctive features, which should be universal, the most characteristic thing about the phonematic units are the phonological systems that the phonemes of a particular language create. The distinctive features constitute the theoretical substance, the possible choices, whereas the actual choice that a particular language makes from this inventory determines which of these distinctive features are functionally relevant in that language.

Once the characteristic of 'meaning-bearing' has been eliminated from the morphemes (cf. below, section 3.3) the relationship between phonemes and morphemes would have to be re-examined: on strictly formal grounds the 'consist-of' relation between them could perhaps be saved.

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[2] I prefer to talk about clauses rather than sentences, since a 'sentence' might include several clauses; thus, a clause-complex may be either a 'sentence' or a (longer) paragraph. M o r p h o - s y n - t a c t i c a l l y this is all the information required for categories above the morpheme and morpheme-complex.

These phonological and morpho-syntactic aspects of language as well as the (reference, sense, and denotation) information in the lexicon, constitute what I have referred to as f o r m in language. That is, the means we are forced to use for the purpose of verbal communication.

By the aspect of f u n c t i o n is meant the way we use language in particular situations. Some kind of behavioural information lies behind the output from the 'linguistic faculty' in our minds, and language, as we hear or see it around us every day, is only a reflection of our ideas and intentions in a necessary medium. And what we want to communicate is reflected not merely by the linguistic form, but also in how we use language.

On the basis of the f o r m - f u n c t i o n distinction the 'meaning' aspect of language will have to be divided into two components: on the one hand the lexicon, and on the other, the 'semantico-functional component' of language. By making this distinction s i g n meaning can be separated from f u n c t i o n a l , or semantic meaning. (Firth -- implicitly at least -- made a similar distinction between 'meaning', and 'semantic function', respectively.)

The study of sign meaning is lexicology, and the term s e m a n - t i c s is here retained for functional meaning. Thus, sign meaning is represented in the lexicon, and together with the units and relationships on the phonological and morphological hierarchies constitutes the formal aspect of language. The lexicon supplies bits of language with potential meanings. That is, it gives a word-for-word meaning to a morpho-syntactic clause, by attaching 'labels' on the elements in the morpho-syntactic hierarchy. Furthermore, it functions as a kind of recognition address for the functional, or semantic meaning, which in its turn provides information as to how this morpho-syntactic clause functions in a specific context.

Strictly speaking, it is not quite correct to speak of the lexicon as being part of the f o r m - aspect of language. Rather, the lexicon mediates between the form and the function in constituting the input to both aspects. In this sense then, the lexicon is t h e basic-generative component.

Apart from sense relations of individual items, the lexicon also contains information about common collocations, where possible this information being abstracted as some kind of semantic features. This is, however, only potential information. The actually occurring sequences belong to the domain of f u n c t i o n . The functional actuality will, among other things, show that possible semantic features contained in the lexicon

are only t e n d e n c i e s (cf. Haas 1973) of the functional items.

A sentence like

(1) The boy loves his sister

would be analyzed on the morpho-syntactic hierarchy as consisting of the morphemes the/def.art., boy, love, s/3p.sg.pres., he/..., s/gen., sister. Loves would be a morpheme-complex. And perhaps the+boy, and his+sister could also be analyzed as morpheme-complexes. And, (1) as a whole is a clause. The 'meaning' that can be ascribed to such a morpho-syntactic clause remains on an i n - i s o l a t i o n level, though. All the morphemes in (1) have an entry in the lexicon (which also includes statements about functional words, and affixes, and how they are applicable to most of the other morphemes, or concatenations of morphemes), and in this sense the lexical entries are 'labels' that get attached to the morphemes. With the help of selectional and such like specifications in the lexicon we are then able to give a f o r m - interpretation of (1).

This kind of lexical meaning is often a prerequisite[3] for the functions a sentence can have in a particular situation. And it is in this way that the lexicon functions as a recognition address for the semantic meaning. The semantico-functional component deals with language in terms of meaningfulness. Tentatively, I regard this component as having four interdependent aspects: the context-of-situation, the prosody, the text, and the functeme. In the following I shall briefly consider each of these semantic aspects.

3. Towards a functional theory of semantics

3.1. C o n t e x t - o f - s i t u a t i o n . First, I want to make a theoretical distinction between the context-of-situation, and situational setting, and regard the latter as a matter to a large extent outside linguistics proper. This is not, however, to say that elements in situational settings lack linguistic relevance. The contexts-of-situation are linguistic abstractions of real-life contextual settings, abstractions in the sense of Firth (1950).

Firth considered the following categories and their interrelations as relevant for linguistic work (cf. Firth 1950:182).

(2) A. the relevant features of participants, persons, and roles
B. the verbal action of the participants

[3] In the sense that most verbal messages have some sort of syntactic structure.

C. the non-verbal action of the participants
D. the relevant objects
E. the effect of the verbal action

With such a construct Firth wanted to include the social aspects of language in linguistic theory.[4]

The context-of-situation as an abstraction of situational settings as I see it would include

(3) A. a specification of the linguistic frame (cf. Fillmore 1975,1976,1977) in which communication takes place, e.g. a merchandize transaction; and within this frame
B. the relevant participants, and their specific roles; and
C. temporally and spatially relevant objects, including persons as bystanders.

Textual or pragmatic presuppositions will not have to be stated explicitly as presuppositions. Such 'presuppositions' are either to be found overtly somewhere else in the text (and are thus explained as text linguistic phenomena), or they are present as part of the context-of-situation in which a text functions (and thus cease to be presuppositions). On the other hand, lexical presuppositions, e.g. boast as a verb implying 'personal achievement of speaker' (cf. Enkvist 1978), belong to the area of lexicology.

One further point should be stressed. The fact that a relevant context-of-situation is abstracted from the 'real', outside world with its innumerable situations, or situational settings, does not mean that we are restricted to a strictly defined subset of all possible situations. New frames can be created, bringing in new participants or objects, as need arises. What is or is not going to be linguistically relevant need not be decided in advance. That is, we need not decide on an abstract frame in all its details b e f o r e undertaking a specific analysis of a specific linguistic phenomenon or text.

3.2. T e x t a n d p r o s o d y . The other three aspects of the semantico-functional component -- the functeme, the prosody, and the text --.are connected with the actual functioning of language i n abstracted contexts-of-situation. The functeme can be considered a special kind of text, namely, the smallest element in language which has a semantic function: the minimum (verbal) t e x t being a functeme.

The prosodic aspect of language, which shall not be discussed in

[4] For a concrete exemplification of an analysis according to Firth's categories -- with slight modifications -- see Mitchell (1957).

detail here, tries to tie down matters like intonation which are linguistically relevant from a communicative point of view. This would include those things typical of (oral) communication in terms of spatial closeness between speaker and hearer. Intonation, and various functional utterance particles and clitics (cf. Östman 1977, forthc.a, forthc.b, MS) are the most usual realizations of prosody, though e.g. voice quality might also have linguistically relevant functions in this respect. Prosody can also be viewed as an aspect functionally superimposed on the formal aspect of language.

My definition of a text very much overlaps with that of Halliday & Hasan:

> A text is a unit of language in use. It is not a grammatical unit, like a clause or a sentence; and it is not defined by its size. ... A text is not something that is like a sentence, only bigger, it is something that differs from a sentence in kind.
>
> (Halliday & Hasan 1976:1-2)

A text will here be seen as the proper unit for semantic (as opposed to lexical) investigations. The function of a text is only delimited by an abstracted context-of-situation. A text is made up of an illocutionary act (a "speech act"), or illocutionary acts. It is not merely the morpho-syntactic form of a clause that determines its use in a context-of-situation, but -- and especially -- the illocutionary force behind a text or part of a text. Thus, (1) might be taken as a warning if you are about to do some harm to the sister. Firth (cf. above) talked about the e f f e c t of the verbal action as a relevant linguistic category. Though one can of course argue that the function of a text is the meaning it has for a given interpreter, it would perhaps be more to the point to characterize the function of a text in terms of the intentions that the listener/interpreter thinks he can extract as intentions of the speaker.

A text is also influenced by the attitude of the speaker, as well as, of course, the propositional content in terms of actualized functemes. The different aspects of the attitude of the speaker can be seen from Figure 2.

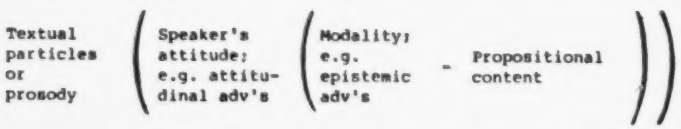


Figure 2.

In Östman (forthc. a, forthc. b) I have dealt with these matters in more detail, especially from the point of view of different functions of attitudinal and modal adverbials, and 'functional utterance particles'.

It can be seen that this approach resembles Bühler's famous triangle for the characterization of the basic aspects of language: the message (= the actuality of the lexicon), the speaker (in particular, his attitudes), and the hearer (more specifically, the effect of the illocutionary force of the speaker's message on the listener):

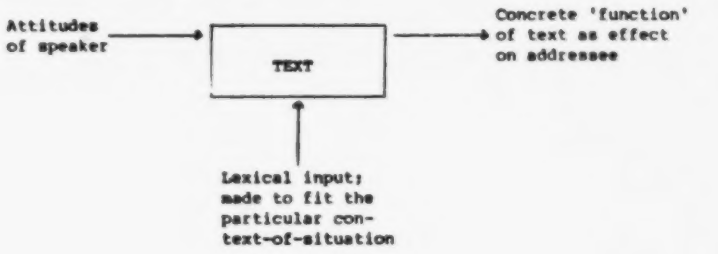

Attitudes of speaker
TEXT
Concrete 'function' of text as effect on addressee
Lexical input; made to fit the particular context-of-situation

Figure 3.

Semantic networks within a systemic framework would provide a theory of how to systematize and abstract different functions of texts. Halliday, as did Firth, stresses the meaning-implies-choice principle. Thus, to be able to state the meanings accessible to a speaker in a particular context-of-situation we need -- according to Halliday -- (a) to state the options available, and (b) to show how these options are systematically related to one another. A semantic network of the systemics type is, however, o p e n - e n d e d in delicacy. That is, "it is always possible to add further specification, but it is never necessary to do so" (Halliday 1972:5).

The real, concrete uses of language which take place in situational settings are to be seen as abstracted into texts, in the same way as the situations themselves are abstracted into contexts-of-situation. This, like all instances of abstraction involves an element of idealization, such that idiolectal and 'connotative' features of texts are, on this theoretical level, left out as non-linguistic matters. On the other hand, a text is influenced (and partly determined) with respect to its function both by paralinguistic and prosodic features of language (as well as -- on a different level, and perhaps to a lesser extent -- by the truth or falsity of what is being communicated).

I do not want to restrict the analysis of the functional aspect of language to one illocutionary act followed by another. I regard as important the larger frameworks of s e t s of illocutionary acts, comprising parts of an interaction, a textual paragraph, or the like. This raises a host of important questions, though. Should, for instance, a paragraph be viewed as always comprising a set of illocutionary acts, or should it perhaps rather be viewed as one illocutionary act? How far could this argument be extended: could a short story, or even a novel be regarded as comprising single illocutionary acts? -- At the other extreme we can (and will) argue that a functeme can be an illocutionary act. But is 'silence' also one? Will it perhaps be necessary to classify different kinds of silences? Should this classification be made on text-linguistic criteria? That, in turn, would involve an element of circularity.

At the textual level of language, variability and indeterminacy are particularly conspicuous. Though we certainly make use of underlying behaviouristic strategies, and try to conform to social norms and tactics, when we create texts, we do so, not according to strict algorithmic rules, but rather according to quite loose (though perhaps statistically determinable) principles. And the same is true when deciding on the particular function and illocutionary force of texts. In other words, we shall have serious difficulty in setting up strict rules to account for and predict any possible output on this level. Recognizing this, many linguists have argued that text grammars simply cannot be written (cf. e.g. Krzeszowski 1975). Such an argument, however, starts off from the wrong end, i.e. from the idea that language really i s a set of algorithmic and clear-cut rules (comparable to natural-science laws), waiting to be unravelled.

3.3. F u n c t e m e , m o r p h e m e , a n d i d i o m . By stipulating a smallest unit like the functeme I want to indicate that the functional aspect of language should not be seen merely as something over and above its formal peculiarities. The functeme is the smallest element in language which has a functional meaning, and in this sense it is comparable to the morpheme on the morpho-syntactic hierarchy, which has a lexical, 'in-isolation' meaning. A functeme can be regarded as a functional lexeme (in the sense of Lyons and others). However, a functeme is not a lexicological unit, it is not to be found, nor to be described in isolation from a particular context-of-situation. A functional definition of the functeme also implies that we need not decide b e f o r e h a n d whether a

combination of elements is one or several functemes.

I want to illustrate the difference between a morpheme and a functeme by considering in some detail the concept of 'idiom'.

What a proper definition of 'idiom' really should sound like has for long been a matter of debate in linguistic discussions. At least in part this controversy stems from neglecting to make the basic distinction between the linguistic aspects of form and function. Similarly, in some versions of structuralist grammar, whether the morpheme really is discoverable without recourse to meaning created uneasiness about the whole concept of 'morpheme'. From the point of view of the neo-Bloomfieldian structuralists the morpheme was originally intended to be a syntactic unit only. But, when it was realized that the unit that had been discovered was also a basic lexical or semantic unit, the morpheme received its dual function of minimal semantic and minimal syntactic unit in language. With idiomatic expressions transformational-generative grammarians have also experienced difficulty, basically -- I would argue -- because they have taken over the structuralists' 'morpheme' concept (with sligh modifications towards more abstractness) under the name of 'formative'.

*

In reviewing the concept of the morpheme in 1958 Hockett also started off with defining morphemes as "the minimum meaningful elements in utterances" (p. 92). In later chapters of his Course, when he is discussing idiomatic expressions, Hockett finds reason to depart from this definition, and suggests the following:

> Let us momentarily use the term "Y" for any grammatical form the meaning of which is not deducible from its structure. Any Y, in any occurrence in which it is not a constituent of a larger Y, is an i d i o m . ... If we are to be consistent in our use of the definition, we are forced also to grant every morpheme idiomatic status, save when it is occurring as a constituent of a larger idiom, since a morpheme has no structure from which its meaning could be deduced. ... we can now assert that any utterance consists wholly of an integral number of idioms. Any composite form which is not itself idiomatic consists of smaller forms which are.
>
> (Hockett 1958:172)

Hockett's decision to include monomorphemic elements among 'idioms' has not -- as far as I know -- met with much sympathy. However, I find that his views here-- apart from being simply a logically necessary further step in his definition -- are defensible from a semantic point of

view.[5] That is, from a s e m a n t i c o - f u n c t i o n a l point of view there is no need for any subcategorization of functemes.

Hockett also seems to be making some kind of distinction between morphemes as forms, and idioms as meanings of these forms. On p. 172-3 he says

> Bear is presumably the same morpheme in women bear children and in I can't bear that pain, but it is different idioms in these two environments.

Householder (1961) tries to develop further Hockett's ideas about the idiom. However, at the outset Householder makes a distinction between 'minimal idioms' and (presumably) other idioms -- without explicitly defining either. He goes on to argue that 'morpheme' is as good a name as any for these 'minimal idioms'. But in making such seemingly innocent renamings Householder blurs the whole issue.

The tagmemicist position, according to which an idiomatic expression is classified as having one specific function in a sentence is especially tenable from my point of view. However, Pike (1967) makes a distinction between morphemes and hypermorphemes on the basis that the latter consist of "two or more specific morphemes" (p. 427). Semantically, however, such a structural division does not seem adequate.

Both Pike and Hockett imply that the morpheme should be seen as having two separate aspects, a morpho-syntactic one, and a semantic one.

Makkai (1972) -- working within a stratificational framework -- objects to Hockett's use of 'idiom', because the term "includes material that really belongs in two separate systems [i.e. strata] , the lexemic and the sememic" (p. 31). Examples of 'idioms' belonging on Makkai's sememic stratum would be too many cooks spoil the broth, to be or not to be, and Hockett's example Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party.

Makkai's objection I suppose is inspired by a wish to retain the structuralistic 'building-block' view of language. But even an approach

[5] However, idioms are not distinguishable from other constructions on syntactic grounds, in the sense that morphemes are distinguished from one another. For example, if the applicability of various syntactic transformations is taken as a criterion for relative idiomaticity, then it is quite impossible (on mere syntactic grounds) to say what is and what is not an idiomatic expression. Rather, we have to set up a gradience hierarchy. Syntactically, an idiom would then be defined as an expression lying 'high' on the idiomatic gradience, i.e. expressions that cannot undergo any (or very few) of a number of relevant transformations.

stressing the structure of language over its function needs little more than a rank-shifting device to handle complex expressions 'functioning-as' subject, object, or what have you. The fact that an 'idiom' (or any other functeme) from a syntactic point of view is a complex construction should not a priori be let to influence our semantic description of (the functional side of) language.

Matthews (1974) makes explicit the distinction between the grammarian's and the semanticist's way of looking at these matters. Thus, in Matthews's terminology l e x e m e stands for monomorphemic words a n d compounds like ice-cream, and Latin liquefacio. For longer expressions Matthews uses the term 'idiom' (or 'idiom lexeme'). But he points out that this is a distinction made on a 'grammatical' basis (Matthews 1974:35),

> We will not say -- as the student of meaning might perhaps prefer us to say -- that 'TRIBUNUS MILITARIS' is itself a single composite Noun.

*

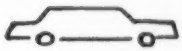
The generally accepted definition of an idiom in all the works referred to above is -- at least implicitly -- that its meaning is not predictable from its parts. As a definition in semantic terms this is tenable, and in my framework idioms are normal instances of functemes. This means that what are generally regarded as 'idioms' should be considered as basically f u n c t i o n a l units in language. All types of word groups with set meanings are particular instances of functeme meaning. The meaning of such expressions should not be considered in isolation. The context in which they occur, and the text or illocutionary act they occur in or as, determine their meanings, as well as whether they are to be taken as set phrases, or as constructions comprising a combination of mono-morphemic functemes. The f u n c t i o n of an expression is the basic criterion for deciding whether it is one or more functemes.

This would mean that kick the bucket is one functeme where the context-of situation allows only the meaning 'die', but that it can be several functemes in a context where objects such as buckets are part of the requisites.

Saying that the smallest semantico-functional unit in language is the functeme, rather than the morpheme, does not neglect nor overlook the n o r m a l (in terms of frequency) one-to-one correspondence relation between one morpheme on the syntactic hierarchy, and one functeme in the functional 'component'. However, and for instance, what is usually called an idiom corresponds in my framework morpho-syntactically to a

morpheme-complex, and semantically to one functeme.

Summing up my own views about the status of the morpheme would amount to saying that it is a semantically neutral unit (cf. also Bazell 1964). The fact that car means, or can be used as referring to something like this



is not a language-functional matter per se. I would like to suggest a semantic approach, then, wherein the semantic units, like my functemes, are lexically taken for granted. This means that from a semantic point of view it is not our question to ask what car means, but rather: how do we use functeme like car? [6]

Explications of such notions as 'proper meaning of X', 'difference/identity of meaning between X and Y' belong to lexicology, not to the area of functional, syntagmatic semantics. The lexicon is a component of its own, which consists of all the monomorphemic 'words' and affixes in the particular language, for taxonomic reasons classified according to what is normally called selectional or subcategorizational features plus their stylistic and other connotations. These features are not universal in any real sense, though, and the inventory of such features is not necessarily finite.

Furthermore, the information stored in the lexicon mediates between language and reality, and the lexicon is the direct source from which the functional functemes get their input as 'potentialities'.

Thus, the meaning of an idiom is ascertained through a process of lexical rank-shifting, the result of which is the input to one functional functeme. The lexicon itself does not include idioms or phrasal verbs as wholes. But a verb, say, has associated with its lexical entry the information that if it occurs together with a certain particle, these two elements (the verb and the particle) might together form the input to one functeme. Similarly, though a construction like kick the bucket is to be seen as a functional functeme in its idiomatic sense, the lexical entries for kick and bucket contain a potential ⟨IDIOM⟩ feature in the lexicon (cf. Figure 4), specifying that when they occur together in a certain compact combination their 'ordinary' lexical meaning has a certain probability to change. The probability itself will or will not be actualized depending on the textual and contextual environments.

[6] Aspects relating to the distinction between 'meaning' and 'use' have of course been discussed in great detail by philosophers.

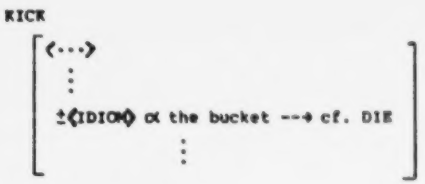


Figure 4.

3.4. T h e r e s u l t i n g p i c t u r e . The model of language that results from what I have said above is presented schematically in Figure 5. As pointed out before, this is a very rough, and very preliminary sketch, and it will no doubt need refinements in most areas.

4. Indeterminacy in language

We can now return to the question of indeterminacy in language. I shall here briefly suggest how this property of language is to be accounted for in a framework of the type I have outlined above.

Historically speaking, the debate about the nature of language variation can be said to go back at least to that between the analogists and the anomalists in ancient Greece. Attempts at constructing ideal languages as early as the 17th century were made precisely to escape the indeterminacy of natural languages. Today the use of mathematical notations and formal logic in the description of natural languages has increased enormously, and many 20th-century linguists even seem to have turned the whole matter upside down, and believe that these idealisations s u f f i c e to describe natural languages. (Cf. Enkvist forthc.) Recently, when the general quest for explicit formulations in linguistic research became everyman's bread, logical formulae for how to describe language most efficiently, most economically, and most explicitly began to flourish. Especially in grammars of the 'categorial' kind, such as Montague grammar, and -- though to a lesser extent -- transformational-generative grammar, the logical formulae as such tended to gain in interest and attract more investigation than every-day, ill-defined, language that such formulae purported to simulate, or even explain.

Naturally, all data is classified in some sense before it is compared to the predictions of a theory (if in no other way, then at least through

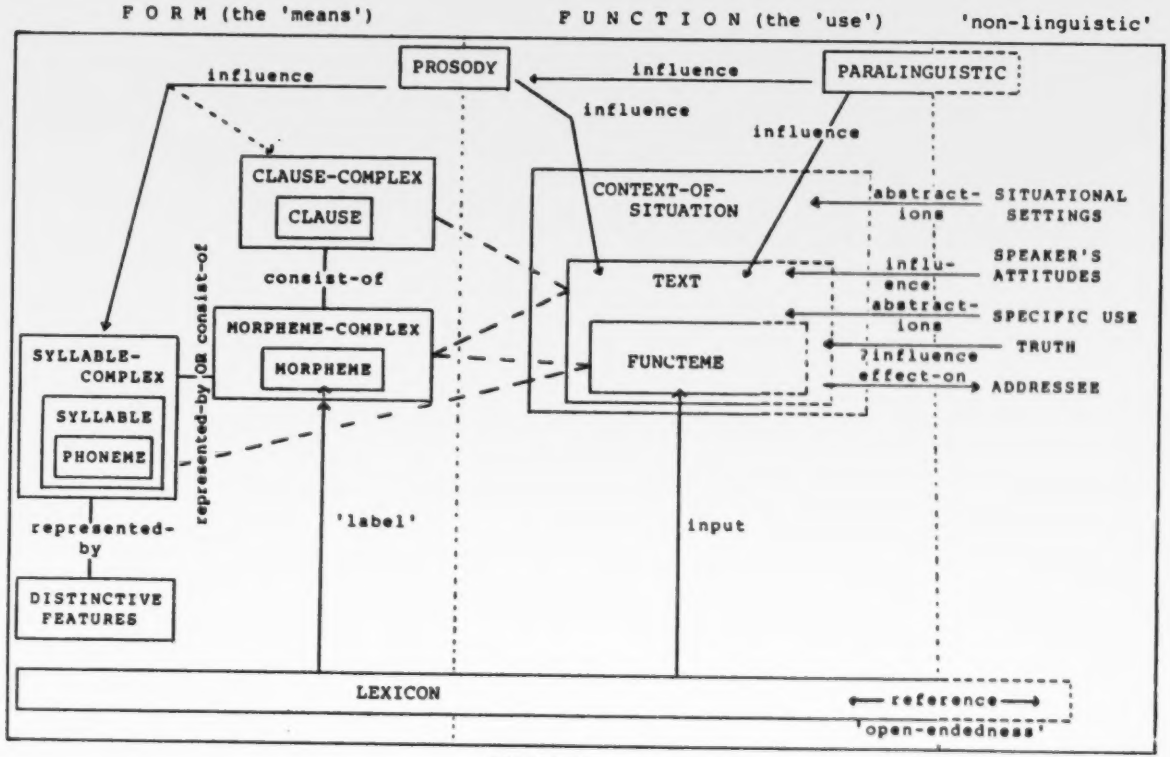

F O R M (the 'means')
F U N C T I O N (the 'use')
'non-linguistic'
PROSODY
influence
influence
PARALINGUISTIC
influence
influence
CLAUSE-COMPLEX
CLAUSE
CONTEXT-OF-SITUATION
'abstract-ions
SITUATIONAL SETTINGS
consist-of
TEXT
influ-ence
SPEAKER'S ATTITUDES
'abstract-ions
SPECIFIC USE
MORPHEME-COMPLEX
MORPHEME
FUNCTEME
?influence effect-on
TRUTH
ADDRESSEE
SYLLABLE-COMPLEX
SYLLABLE
PHONEME
represented-by OR consist-of
represented-by
'label'
input
DISTINCTIVE FEATURES
LEXICON
reference
'open-endedness'

Figure 5.

human perception), but in some areas this 'preclassification' of data has gone too far. This is the case when a new set of language data gets described not with respect to other parts of natural language, but with respect to already established formulae -- in the manner of descriptions in the natural sciences. Thus, when considering these formulae the previous step from language as 'ill-defined' data to language in terms of a linguistic theory governed by strict rules, gets overlooked.

This view, according to which language is constructed on the basis of rules which are supposed to predict all and only the acceptable sentences of a language, is plausible as a linguistic hypothesis. However, we then find that there are matters in language (as in all social phenomena, and in human behaviour in particular) which cannot be wholly predicted. That is, in concrete situations we do not necessarily have to conform to the rules on which we have built our linguistic description. When testing the hypotheses of our linguistic system against actual language data we might find ourselves in a situation where we either have to admit that linguistic rules can be broken,[7] and/or, we ascribe this fact to variables thus far unknown, and make it our zeal to try to pin down these unknown variables, and thus include them under predictability (or determinism[8]). If we think that our present set of rules is not good enough, we will need other k i n d s of rules to be able to account for language variability.

Language variability can be approached on different levels: we can say with Labov and others that it is the sociological variables that affect the rule system. Thus, we need only stipulate variable, or 'weighted' rules as an appendix to our strict-system rules. Another approach is to say that our linguistic constructs are themselves fuzzy, that they do not have well-defined borders, but shade into one another. This view can be amply exemplified from the syntactic literature: Quirk's gradience, Ross's squishes, Lakoff's fuzzyness arguments, and similar arguments by Bach, all show that the linguist's word-class categories should be seen rather as

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[7] A good example in point is deviant poetry.

[8] As should be clear from what has been said above, I think of determinism in terms of a linguisticalized version of 'physical determinism': all the structures of a language that occur are specifically and exactly, and in all their respects predictable from a definite set of linguistic rules. 'Variability' is in this paper used as a synonym for indeterminacy.

forming a gradience of more or less. (Gradience, of course, is also a linguistic construct.)

These investigators try to pin down variablity in language as a matter of f o r m in the linguistic theory. Of course there is variability in linguistic form, but this variablity should be seen i n r e l a t i o n t o a (specific) linguistic theory, which in turn might, or might not (particularly because of the formal indeterminacy) suffice as a description of language. -- But how then could the variable facts of language themselves be included in our linguistic theories?

First of all, too much stress cannot be given to the importance of language as (a) an instance of social behaviour, and (b) a system which is primarily functional communication. These are two of the prerequisites for understanding why language has to have built into it a certain amount and kind of latitude and non-rigidity. Historical language change and more advanced forms of general and idiolectal creativity arise out of this variability factor, and would not be possible unless language possessed such a factor.

Thus, we have to make a theoretical distinction between indeterminacy in the structure of language, in its form, and the kind of indeterminacy which has come about due to the communicative function of language. In actual fact we can, of course, not separate these aspects (since the latter is probably the cause of the former) but as a theoretical starting point the distinction is probably necessary.[9]

Structural indeterminacy can be found in phonetics and phonology (e.g. different pronunciations of [r] by different speakers of the same language, different initial consonant clusters being used and accepted by different individuals), as well as in morphology, syntax, and the lexicon (e.g. several forms of one case ending being possible, as well as different forms of, say, the imperfect tense). (Hockett's idea seems to be that indeterminacy comes about as a result of conflicting analogies (1968:90-3). But his suggestion to deal with language variablity from the point of view of language as a set of habits or analogies, can only cater for the formal aspects of indeterminacy.)

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[9] From another point of view a distinction between different kinds of variability can be drawn in terms of (a) socially, and stylistically "accepted" variability, and (b) individual variability. One of the main causes for individual variability is then precisely the property of what I call functional indeterminacy in language.

Functional indeterminacy, on the other hand, is to be found on a particular occasion of speaking; it may be seen as a morpho-syntactic construction of which the information in the lexicon cannot alone give an appropriate analysis. In effect, this means that the lexicon also is open-ended and indeterminant. The features and other facts given in the matrices of each lexical entry are merely tendentially governed.

As I mentioned above, functemes are t h e semantico-functional units in language, and they need not be classified beforehand (i.e. before they are used, and function in a certain text), as 'lexemes' would have to be.

Instances of functional indeterminacy are not merely various ambiguous structures, but also such matters as tendencies (cf. Haas 1973), blends (cf. Bolinger 1961), semiproductivity (cf. Bolinger 1961, Dik 1967, Matthews 1971), and similar indeterminant matters discussed e.g. in Palmer (1972).

To take the problem of semiproductivity. Consider Matthews's hierarchy,

(4) a. He cabled that ...
b. He radioed that ...
c. ?He memoed that ...
d. ??He messaged that ...
e. *He lettered that ...
f. *He wirelessed that ...

(Matthews 1971:51)

To account for the facts in (4) we would need a more general statement in the lexicon which says that e.g. a Noun can be used as a Verb, a fact which is not as such stated in the matrix of each and every Noun. (General statements are also otherwise needed in the lexicon, e.g. to take care of function words and affixes.) Semi-productivity is thus left as what it is, an ill-defined area in the morpho-syntactic part of our linguistic theory; and moreover, an ill-definition which is due to functional indeterminacy.

The interpretation of a non-productive or semiproductive coinage is usually quite easy. The text in which it functions determines its meaning and use, and the text itself is, as earlier noted, 'open-ended'. However, structures like those in (4) are also indeterminant in the sense that, e.g. (4e) might be more acceptable in one context than in another.

What I mean by indeterminacy as a result of creation-on-the-spot includes idioms, metaphors, the use of propositions with unforeseeable illocutions, fantasy, science fiction, and interpretable and uninterpretable nonsense. Such creations are predictable only statistically, as certain tendencies in language. If they were computable, then language would certainly lose much of its creativity, and it would no more be fit as a

human method for communication, with all that this implies, but rather something akin to a mathematical system.

Finally, a word about metaphors. When we are faced with an utterance of the form Shut that lion's gape!, we first check with the abstracted contextual elements in this particular context-of-situation. When we check the objects we find nothing which corresponds to our lexical entry for lion. Thus, we make a reinterpretation which depends on the particular situation at hand. The word shut presupposes that something is open. What is open in the particular situation? A window? A door? A gate? Somebody's mouth? -- Anyway, even if the morpheme gape occurred without shut, it would still -- in the lexicon -- be noted as something having aperture, and lion's, as an attribute to gape, would imply that the aperture is fairly large in size.

The same kind of analysis can be made for paragraph-long metaphors. These are also determined from the particular situation and interpreted both in terms of dictionary-entry meanings of words, and how these fit into the particular situation.

5. Conclusion

The basic task for linguistic semantics is to relate language to the entities, qualities, and functions in the extralinguistic world. Since this is ultimately also what the whole of linguistics is about, it would seem that to a large extent linguistics i s semantics, and that language i s meaning, in concrete communicative situations. With this as a background I have in the present essay tried to suggest a framework for a more concrete and functional linguistic theory. Suggestions similar to this one have been made decades ago, but they seem to have been overshadowed by a general linguistic tendency to be as formal and rigorous as possible in all areas of language, as in all other sciences; in itself a laudable attempt.

However, this has not only bridged the gap between logic and linguistics; it has also, to a certain extent, blinded some linguists into believing that language is in fact a logical system. Preoccupation with syntax in terms of strict rules soon developed into a further challenge on the part of the linguist: the plea for similar rule-governed principles in semantics, as was thought to have been found in syntax.

The whole issue seems to be an instance of the endless search for observationality and verifiability with respect to language, and rigorous

criteria for one's linguistic research; a preoccupation which also flourished in the days of Bloomfield and the post-Bloomfieldians.

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